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SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

FOR DAS MCMULLEN AND DASD JOHNSON FROM AMBASSADOR BAXTER  
STATE ALSO FOR WHA/BSC DASCHBACH

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [OVIP](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [UY](#)  
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR TRIP TO URUGUAY OF DASD STEPHEN JOHNSON AND  
WHA DAS CHRISTOPHER MCMULLEN, OCT 27-30, 2008

REF: MVD 583 AND PREVIOUS

11. (U) This telegram is sensitive but unclassified, and not for  
Internet distribution.

SUMMARY  
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12. (SBU) Your visit comes at a time of strong and growing engagement  
between the U.S. and Uruguay's left-leaning Frente Amplio (FA)  
coalition government. Our areas of focus include trade, education,  
science and technology, and counter-narcotics cooperation. Our  
military-to-military relationship is also prospering, with  
increasing cooperation as Uruguay's armed forces assume a wider  
regional profile. The bilateral relationship overall is solid, and  
local polling shows that over 55 percent of Uruguayans have a  
positive image of the U.S., a favorable percentage for the region  
and up from just 36 percent in 2003. We are working with all  
segments of Uruguayan society to ensure a continuation of those  
positive circumstances beyond the 2009 presidential and legislative  
elections, campaigning for which has already begun. End Summary.

Uruguay Today  
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13. (U) Uruguay is a stable, democratic nation of 3.3 million people,  
almost half of them residing in its capital, Montevideo. Uruguay is  
one of Latin America's wealthiest and most egalitarian countries,  
despite a four-year long severe recession that ended in 2003, cut  
personal income nearly in half and lowered Uruguay's historically  
excellent socio-economic indicators.

Current Politics  
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14. (SBU) President Vazquez has charted a moderate course since  
taking office after the Frente Amplio's first-ever victory in  
October 2004. Until its rise from opposition, the FA rallied its  
followers with considerable anti-U.S. rhetoric, and both the USG and  
the FA were unsure how the relationship would proceed when the FA  
came to power. However, President Vazquez has consistently  
demonstrated a desire for strong relations with the U.S. and a  
willingness to pursue a cooperative agenda to that end, including  
active trade discussions with the USG.

15. (SBU) With national elections in October 2009, the Vazquez  
administration is coming into its home stretch. President Vazquez  
maintains high approval ratings, and his handling of the FA  
coalition of disparate parties is widely admired. He is determined  
to ensure his legacy as a moderate and practical head of state, as  
well as position his party for the 2009 elections. A March 2008  
cabinet shake-up eased out ideologues, put in technocrats, and  
placed a new emphasis on a more stable and balanced foreign policy.  
Vazquez' program also focuses on social and labor policies. Our  
bilateral relationship under Vazquez has been productive, but

election-year politics -- jockeying within each party for its presidential candidacy has already begun in earnest -- might limit the public profile of our cooperation over the next year.

#### Political System and 2009 Presidential Candidates

16. (U) Uruguay's constitution institutionalizes a strong presidency, subject to legislative and judicial checks. The constitution also provides for a bicameral General Assembly (congress). A 30-member Senate and 99-member Chamber of Deputies comprise the General Assembly. Uruguay's presidents and members of both houses of congress serve five-year terms.

17. (U) There are three major political parties in Uruguay: the ruling Frente Amplio; the National (Blanco) Party; and the Colorado Party. The two traditional parties, the Blancos and Colorados, were